



National Elevator Industry, Inc.

CODE & SAFETY OFFICE

37 Woodbine Park • Geneseo, New York 14454 • 585.302.0813 Fax: 585.302.0841

WWW.NEII.ORG • E-Mail: info@neii.org

TESTIMONY OF
BRIAN D. BLACK, NATIONAL ELEVATOR INDUSTRY INC.
REGARDING
CONNECTICUT SENATE BILL NO. 309
AN ACT CONCERNING RESIDENTIAL ELEVATOR SAFETY

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Brian Black and as the Code and Safety Consultant for the National Elevator Industry, I share the concerns articulated by my colleagues from the elevator industry who are testifying today. Clearly, everyone in this room shares a common goal of ensuring the safety of the citizens of Connecticut in homes equipped with private residence elevators.

Having said this, my experience is distinct from others speaking today. Prior to my work as an elevator code consultant I spent over thirty years as a specialist in accessibility for persons with disabilities. Seventeen of those years involved serving as the building code specialist for the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, an organization serving paralyzed veterans in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In this role I worked with many veterans – most of whom use wheelchairs – for which the installation of safe residential elevators in their homes was critical to their well being and quality of life.

My experience serving veterans at EPVA reinforces the urgent need for this legislation.

Many paralyzed veterans hired residential elevator contractors that proved to be unqualified at installing and servicing their products. One needed to call the installer back on at least five separate occasions when faulty wiring, inoperable doors and malfunctioning cab controls became evident after the elevator was installed, making his home virtually unusable and inaccessible to him (and unsafe for his wife and young daughter). A simple inspection of the elevator at the time of installation would have

NEII ASSOCIATION HEADQUARTERS

1677 County Route 64 • P.O. Box 838 • Salem, New York 12865-0838 • 518.854.3100 Fax: 518-854-3257

identified these problems and compelled the installation contractor to correct them before moving on to his next job.

In another case, an elderly woman was riding in a residential elevator that suddenly dropped an entire story because the "drum machine" that spooled the ropes that raised the elevator up and down was incorrectly installed. The serious injuries she incurred could have been prevented had effective regulations been in effect requiring an inspection of the elevator prior to its use.

Even where a residential elevator is installed correctly and is initially safe, subsequent modifications by a homeowner can create dangerous conditions. I was involved in a case where a family installed a residential elevator in their two-story home after their son was paralyzed in a hockey accident. Because he was quadrapalegic with limited upper-arm use, the family modified the elevator doors to make it easier for him to use. In doing so, the family inadvertently deactivated the locking system that prevents a shaft door from opening when the elevator is not at that floor. During a gathering of family and friends, a guest opened the elevator door on the second floor and stepped into the open shaft while the elevator was stopped on the first floor.

The serious injuries she experienced could easily be replicated if any homeowner decides to "fix" a residential elevator while not recognizing and subsequently disclosing to future owners of the property the potentially serious safety issues that could exist. Unless a comprehensive safety inspection is mandated, the buyers' family is potentially at risk. Again, this proposed legislation would remedy such unsafe conditions.

My reasearch indicates that new, single family construction represents the largest market growth in the private residence elevator industry. Homeowners who are installing these devices are financially able to assume the cost of an initial inspection, and persons who are purchasing homes equipped with residential elevators are similarly positioned to cover the cost of an inspection when they purchase their home. The majority of homeowners lack the technical expertise to know whether an elevator has been correctly installed or maintained and thus have no assurance that the equipment is safe for their families or guests. Proposed Senate Bill 309 would correct this problem.